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DE RUEHBUL #3632/01 2981035
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1116
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXP/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4257
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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DEPT FOR SCA.FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A,G/IWI
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY KABUL'S NOMINATIONS FOR 2008 SECRETARY'S
WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. (SBU) Per Reftel, Kabul is pleased to submit its list of nominees for the Secretary's 2008 Award for International Women of courage, keyed to the priorities in the reference. Per instructions, Embassy Kabul is submitting three (3) nominees. All nominees have been informed of the Ambassador's intention to nominate them and are available to travel in March 2008. A list of nominees in rank order follows.

¶2. (SBU) First priority: Suraya PAKZAD
Full legal name: Suraya Pakzad
Job title/association: Founder and president, Voice of Women
Date of birth: 01 October 1968
Country of birth: Afghanistan
Citizenship: Afghan
Address: Bagh-e-Azadi Street, Herat, Afghanistan
Telephone and email: 093-0799-209-386;
vwo suraya@hotmail.com; vwo afg@yahoo.com
Passport number: OR 917728

Justification: Ms. Pakzad is the founder of one of only a few women's non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan and the only NGO that works in the western city of Herat. She founded the Voice of Women in 1988, and it continued operating while Afghanistan was under Taliban rule, a huge achievement to say the least. The organization has worked continuously since its founding to provide shelter for women and girls; to promote the role of women in government, and to provide poverty reduction programs. Ms. Pakzad's organization has offices in Kabul but recently opened an office in Herat because, as Ms. Pakzad says: "we're more needed in Herat." One of the organization's core services is providing shelter and counseling to women who have recently been released from jail, women who have run away from abusive relationships and girls as young as three and four years old who have run away from forced marriages -- a form of indentured servitude under brutal conditions. The organization also works to advocate for increasing the role of women in society and does gender issues programs with girls, boys, women and children. Ms. Pakzad has participated in several workshops at the local, national and regional level, and has visited the U.S. before for workshops. 39 years old, she is married and has six children. She speaks English well, is a native speaker of Dari and also speaks

Pashto. She has been informed of the Ambassador's intention to nominate her and is hugely enthusiastic about the opportunity. She is aware of the impact this would have on her life and assured Poloff October 16 that she understood exactly what this award would bring, both the negative and positive aspects. Ms. Pakzad said she has been threatened for being a courageous woman before and continuing to do a form of work that many in Afghanistan misunderstand and fear, but she continues to do her job, saying &difficult things are often the most important, and there are many things here I must do.8 She is willing to accept this award and is available to travel in March 2008.

13. (SBU) Second priority: Shala MAIHANDOST
Full legal name: Shala Maihandost
Job title/association: Head of the Kabul Department of Women,s Affairs , Ministry of Women,s Affairs
Date of birth: 02 February 1957
Country of birth: Afghanistan
Citizenship: Afghan
Address: 3rd Makroryan, Kabul City
Telephone and email: 093-799-214-502
Passport number: OR 018333

Justification: Mrs. Maihandost has been an outspoken advocate for women,s rights for many years in an unforgivingly harsh environment. She worked as a director of several orphanages in two northern provinces for many years until the Taliban rose to power in 1996. The most visible advocate for women,s rights in the north, she quickly became a target for Taliban ire, and while she tried to remain in Afghanistan and continue her work, the Taliban looted her house and threatened her family. Fearing for her life and the safety

KABUL 00003632 002 OF 002

of her loved ones, Mrs. Maihandost fled to Pakistan, where she spent five years as a refugee. She continued her work while in Pakistan as a tireless champion of her cause, working the entire time with various women,s and children,s rights NGOs and volunteering with the United Nations. When she returned to Kabul in 2001, she drove through the streets, dodging Taliban bodies, calling on a loudspeaker for women to come out and stand up for their rights to be recognized as individuals. In 2002, she was made head of the women,s shura, or council, and later became Deputy Head of the district women,s affairs office in the Ministry of Women,s Affairs. In 2005, she became Head of the Kabul Department (administrative unit) of Women,s Affairs in the same ministry. A well-known figure in Afghanistan, some say she is the voice of women in the country today, and is a very public figure who appears regularly on television and at conferences. Although her activities have placed her in constant danger of personal attack, she has never given up her cause and regularly visits refugee return areas, fighting to publicize issues such as domestic abuse and physical hardship, both of which often occur in returnee areas. She is married with five children and lives in Kabul. She speaks Dari and Pashto and has basic English comprehension. She has been informed of the Ambassador,s intention to nominate her for this award and said that she is not afraid of any possible repercussions, while recognizing the need to take proper precautions for her safety. She is willing to accept this award and is available to travel in March 2008.

14. (SBU) Third priority: Mahbooba HAIDARY
Full legal name: Mahbooba Haidary
Job title/association: Operation and Maintenance Specialist/Trainer, Emergency Irrigation Rehabilitation Project
Date of birth: 06 March 1976
Country of birth: Afghanistan
Citizenship: Afghan
Address: Hayat Street, District 6, Mazar-e-Sharif
Telephone and email: 093-0700-510-550, mahbooba.balkhi@eirp-afg.org; mahboobahaidary@yahoo.com
Passport number: OR 087941

Justification: In addition to three decades of civil war and brutal rule by the Taliban, Afghanistan suffers from poor irrigation and a low water table. Female engineers are particularly rare in Afghanistan, and Ms. Haidary is even rarer in that she is a young, educated woman who worked successfully for an NGO while Afghanistan was under Taliban rule. She has a degree in engineering from Balkh University in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, a relatively progressive area of Afghanistan. Ms. Haidary works primarily in surveying, designing and executing rural infrastructure development works like schools, clinics, roads and water supply facilities. Her projects have helped provide relief to vulnerable communities, and she has worked with the International Organization on Migration to design over 20 schools for girls in the four northern provinces of Afghanistan. She has also briefly worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent here in Afghanistan on sanitary water and latrine projects. She is unmarried, has no children, and lives with her mother and her brother (who is a judge) in Mazar-e-Sharif. She speaks English, Dari, Urdu and Russian. She has not traveled internationally before but would welcome the chance to see the United States and learn about U.S. culture enthusiastically. She has been informed of the Ambassador's intention to nominate her for this award. She said that she was "cautious" of the threat posed by the added publicity but that it would be "worth it to do this for my work and for my country." She is willing to accept this award and is available to travel in March 2008.

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